

Energy Star Homes Seal The Deal

By Scott Nicholson

Energy Star qualified homes are stated to be at least 15 percent more energy efficient than homes built to the 2004 International Residential Code and administered by the Environmental Protection Agency through independent home inspectors.

Any home standing three stories or less can earn the Energy Star label if it has been verified to meet EPA guidelines for energy efficiency. This includes site-constructed homes, attached or detached homes, single or low-rise multi-family residential buildings, manufactured homes, systems-built, modular and log homes, existing homes, or retrofitted homes.



Headwaters Enterprises has built two Energy Star-rated homes in the area, based on energy efficiency and the R-value of the insulation. Photo submitted

Matt Fowler, along with his brother and business partner Luke Fowler, recently completed an Energy Star home they built to sell themselves. "It's all part of green building and it seals up a building very well," Matt said. "It's a great selling feature and a great way to build a house. We'll definitely do more."

Matt said calculations predicted a savings of \$600 a year on electricity bills and had a corresponding savings of carbon dioxide emissions, a primary greenhouse gas linked to global warming. The Energy Star designation requires a round of inspections beyond those required under state or local building permits.

Top areas in which energy efficient is easiest include properly installed insulation that is appropriate to the climate. Insulation of floors, walls and attic insure an even temperature throughout the house and reduce energy consumption for heat.

Energy-efficient windows are a prime area for savings, with advanced technologies such as protective coatings and improved frames help block damaging ultraviolet radiation while keeping heat in during the winter. Sealing of holes and ductwork leading into a home can also help meet the 15-percent energy savings goal.

Appliances and efficient heating and cooling systems are quieter and reduce indoor humidity, and though they often cost more upfront, they generally are more durable and require less maintenance than other models. The Energy Star seal of approval is also applied to lighting fixtures, compact fluorescent bulbs, ventilation fans and appliances such as dishwashers, refrigerators and washing machines.

Chase Ambler of Headwaters Enterprises said he built his first Energy Star custom home about five years ago, and has since built one for his own family. "The reward is a more comfortable home," he said adding that such a home saves energy.

"The challenge is getting the various trades on board who are used to doing something in a certain way," Ambler noted. "They have to get familiar with different practices."

Ambler said the quality of insulation is key, though there are different ways to achieve the high R rating sought under the certification, whether through use of regular fiberglass insulation, blown or loose-fill insulation or a series of layers of foam core and other boards.

In his own home, Ambler estimated he spent an additional \$6,000 on insulation, above the typical \$3,000 to \$4,000 spent for a \$300,000 home. He said the additional 2-percent investment didn't offer a quick payback period, but was not a significant amount when compared with the entire cost of the home.

"We're spending about the same amount of money (on heat) than we did in a smaller home," Ambler said. "The estimate is a 50 percent energy savings and we've reached that, very easily. The payback is many years, but you still get the comfort of a tight home, where you can control the humidity."


"We'd love to do more Energy Star homes," Ambler said, implying that federal tax breaks would spark more interest in energy-efficient homes. "There's not a financial incentive right now."

Local Energy Star inspections are handled by Southface Energy Institute of Boone.

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